



Rapid change, climate adversity and the next 'big dry': Older farmers' mental health

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Abstract:

OBJECTIVE: To describe the experiences of older farmers in the face of prolonged drought and rapid change. **DESIGN:** Content analysis of issues and priorities raised in semi-structured community forums. **SETTING:** Rural centres in NSW. **PARTICIPANTS:** One hundred and fifty older farmers, their families, Industry and Investment NSW, rural financial and mental health services, the Country Women's Association and other non-government agencies. **INTERVENTION:** Five public forums organised under the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program. **RESULTS:** Prolonged drought caused pressures on farmers that compounded the usual stresses of farming and of ageing. These were experienced in the context of rapid social and industry change, fuel price volatility and the insidious threat of climate change. Three main themes were articulated: loss, government compliance pressures and difficulties accessing and/or inappropriate services. **CONCLUSION:** Older farmers felt an overwhelming sense of loss: of profitability and professional success, community status, physical well-being and comfort, the ability to participate in the modern world and, above all, of relationships (partners, children and friends moving away). They interpreted government compliance requirements as evidence of community and government loss of trust in farmers. They resisted using the few mental health services that might be available, fearing being labelled as 'crazy' and discouraged by the culturally inappropriate way in which services were offered. Older farmers would benefit from joint services related to health and well-being simultaneously with modern business management offered in trusted, comfortable settings.

Source: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1440-1584.2011.01219.x>

Resource Description

Communication:

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Other Communication Audience: Farmers

Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Extreme Weather Event

Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal

Extreme Weather Event: Drought

Geographic Feature: 

resource focuses on specific type of geography

Rural

Geographic Location: 

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Non-United States: Australasia

Health Impact: 

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Mental Health/Stress

Mental Health Effect/Stress: Other Mental Disorder

Mitigation/Adaptation: 

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Population of Concern: A focus of content

Population of Concern: 

populations at particular risk or vulnerability to climate change impacts

Elderly, Workers

Other Vulnerable Population: Farmers

Resource Type: 

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Resilience: 

capacity of an individual, community, or institution to dynamically and effectively respond or adapt to shifting climate impact circumstances while continuing to function

A focus of content

Timescale: 

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified

Vulnerability/Impact Assessment: 

resource focus on process of identifying, quantifying, and prioritizing vulnerabilities in a system

A focus of content